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SUBJECT: PLANES, TRAINS, AND AUTOMOBILES: TRANSPORTATION  
DEPSEC CINO MEETS WITH UAE MINISTER

REF: ABU DHABI 2016

1. (SBU) Summary. On June 3, Deputy Secretary of Transportation Maria Cino met with Sultan bin Saeed al-Mansouri, the UAE Minister of Governmental Sector Development, to discuss transportation and development issues. Al-Mansouri discussed the expansion of the UAE's civil aviation sector. He also outlined the UAE's strategy for managing growth and congestion with increased road infrastructure and new railway projects. Turning to the U.S./UAE Free Trade Agreement negotiations, al-Mansouri said that the UAEG needs to do a better job of consulting with the private sector. End summary.

2. (SBU) DepSec Cino, accompanied by Ambassador, FAA rep, and econoff, met with al-Mansouri, Riis Johanson, Director of the UAE Air Navigation Services, and Mohamed Abu Baker Farea, Director of Safety and Security, on June 3 to discuss transportation and development issues. Al-Mansouri told Cino that his vision for the new Ministry of Governmental Sector Development (established in February 2006), is to set an example for the region on how to manage growth. The UAE's economy is growing at 10 percent. During a discussion about the anticipated growth of each country's civil aviation sector, al-Mansouri noted that the UAE expected a 10 percent increase in passenger air travel, and a 15 percent increase in cargo travel in the next year. The UAE has ongoing airport expansions in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai's existing international airports. Additionally, the Minister reported that the first runway of the new cargo airport in Jebel Ali would be open in 2008. Cino agreed that planning for increased air travel is a critical step. She told al-Mansouri the U.S. estimates that by 2015 one billion travelers will travel through the U.S. per year (up from the current rate of 750,000 million per year), and that the U.S. is working to expand the capacity of existing airports to accommodate this increase. (Note: The UAE's Civil Aviation Authority was formerly a part of the UAE Ministry of Communications. With the February 2006 Cabinet changes and the abolishment of the Ministry of Communications, the General Civil Aviation Authority was folded into the new Ministry of Governmental Sector Development. End note.)

3. (SBU) Al-Mansouri told Cino that the roadway congestion in Dubai is particularly troublesome. "We have design problems. For example, there is a critical part of the major highway in Dubai that goes from five lanes to three." He said that the ministry is working with Dubai to add options for getting over Dubai Creek, which separates the two sides of the city. Al-Mansouri reported that Dubai has already begun construction of two new bridges, and that by 2008, Dubai will go from only having three ways to cross the creek to having five (four bridges and one tunnel). (Note: in the June 7

English "Gulf News" daily, Dubai authorities announced that, in addition to the two new bridges under construction, they will build two more bridges over the creek (bringing the total to seven ways to cross the creek). These bridges will be completed in 2009, and will add an additional 24 lanes. End note.) Al-Mansouri also reported that Dubai's internal light rail system would be up and running by September 2009. With Dubai's significant estimated growth, al-Mansouri is aware that the railway infrastructure additions will not be sufficient, noting "metro will ease the problem, not solve it." (Note: In late 2005, Dubai's Ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid was quoted in the press as predicting that Dubai's 1.2 million population would grow to 4 million by 2015. End note.)

14. (SBU) Al-Mansouri said that one way the ministry is working to ease congestion on the roadways is by developing two railway systems: one for cargo and one for passengers. For their cargo lines, he said the UAE had worked with the Dutch, who have a very successful model of using trains to efficiently move cargo. Due to the short distance between the two main cities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai (87 miles), al-Mansouri said that high speed travel was not economically efficient for passengers, and thus his ministry was examining more traditional rail options. Al-Mansouri said the UAE was working to be sure that its rail system is compatible with other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) railroads. He said the GCC countries were exploring the idea of building a 2,000 km (1,243 mile) railroad connecting the six GCC countries.

15. (SBU) Turning to a discussion of the U.S./UAE Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, al-Mansouri told Ambassador and Cino that the UAEG needed to do a better job of consulting with the chambers of commerce on changes resulting from the

ABU DHABI 00002347 002 OF 002

FTA. He said that the business community was worried and felt that it did not have enough information on the impact of an FTA. He said that in addition to providing more information, the UAEG needed to consider the business communities opinions and needs, "Their opinion should be considered, because they have invested and made the UAE economy what it is today." Regarding the expected changes to the UAE's labor laws, al-Mansouri argued that the UAEG should present the changes as being required by the International Labor Organization (ILO), rather than as a condition of the FTA. "The UAE should not let people think it is changing these laws because of political pressure." (Note: Al-Mansouri is a prominent Dubai business owner, and he is actively involved in the Dubai Chamber of Commerce. Thus, his perspective on the U.S./UAE FTA represents Dubai's business interests. He publicly has resisted opening up the UAE's telecommunications sector immediately in response to a U.S.-UAE FTA (reftel). End note.)

16. (SBU) Comment: Al-Mansouri's timeline for completion of Dubai's airport, road, and rail infrastructure projects is ambitious, especially given competing projects. Projects in the UAE typically are delayed well beyond their expected completion date. End comment.

17. (U) Note: DepSec Cino visited UAE as the keynote speaker of a Middle East Partnership Initiative-sponsored training on women's political participation.  
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